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TAGS: [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [PGOV](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: US NGOS SUPPORT LIVELIHOOD PROJECTS AMONG ETHNIC TIBETANS
AND OTHER MINORITY GROUPS IN NORTHWEST YUNNAN

REF: CHENGDU 197 (2008)

CHENGDU 00000149 001.2 OF 003

¶1. (U) This cable contains sensitive but unclassified information -- not for distribution on the Internet.

¶2. (SBU) Summary: Ethnic Tibetans and other minority communities benefit from income-boosting and cultural preservation projects in northwest Yunnan implemented by U.S. NGOs and funded by USAID or private donors. Northwest Yunnan remains the easiest ethnic Tibetan area for international NGOs to work in -- the area did not experience the unrest seen in other Tibetan areas in March 2008, and local officials there remain relatively tolerant of their work. In a Naxi minority community, development of locally cultivated feed and better storage has enabled semi-nomadic people to settle down with their livestock. In one Tibetan village, development of local Tibetan handicrafts helps protect cultural traditions while increasing incomes of vulnerable populations. In another Tibetan village, eco-tourism development has strengthened local residents' stake in preserving the natural environment while improving livelihoods. End summary.

¶3. (SBU) Congenoff recently visited rural communities in northwest Yunnan's Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, where US-based NGOs Heifer International and The Mountain Institute (TMI) currently are carrying out livelihood development projects in minority communities. TMI is a current recipient of USAID funding for its work in Tibetan areas. Heifer has not previously applied for USAID funding, but is currently preparing a USAID application. (Note: Tibetans are the largest ethnic group in the prefecture; they number more than 110,000, which is approximately 30 percent of the total. The prefecture is also home to significant Lisu and Naxi populations, each at more than ten percent, with smaller populations of several other groups. TMI estimates that approximately half the population lives below the official poverty line, and that the majority of these are Tibetan. End note.)

Heifer International:

Supporting a Naxi minority community in Sanba

14. (SBU) According to its field staff, Heifer has about 30 on-going projects in Shangri-la County (formerly Zhongdian). Heifer's programs in Shangri-la, managed by two full-time Heifer staff, encompass most of the minority communities living in the county, including Tibetan communities which comprise the largest group, as well as Lisu, Naxi, Yi, and others. Staff accompanied Congenoff for a visit to their site in a small Naxi minority village near Haba Snow Mountain, about a three hour drive from Shangri-la town. They noted that this is their most successful project measured by both increased community involvement and higher incomes. Most of the community of about 500 (54 households) are engaged in agricultural work, with cattle-raising as the primary income source. The community previously led a semi-nomadic lifestyle, following their cowherds to grazing areas in the surrounding mountains. Under the new Heifer-supported model, they now cultivate enough grass locally and no longer need to graze further afield. The village's elected leader explained that this has resulted in better fed and healthier cattle that command a higher market price.

15. (SBU) Additionally, Heifer has worked with the community to set up five "self-help groups" that work together on activities such as tree planting, learning about traditional culture, improving public hygiene, building and maintaining winter feed storage, and using technology to work more efficiently. Heifer staff and community members pointed out newly built toilets, cattle pens, feed storage facilities, and solar water heaters all of which they noted were built with project support. The Heifer staff reported that they travel regularly to the village in order to provide further training to community members. However, despite the evident improvement of livelihoods, the lack of a road to their community makes access to basic public services still difficult. The nearest health clinic, staffed with two doctors, is about an hour away by foot, and there are

CHENGDU 00000149 002.2 OF 003

few vehicles in town. While community members reported that the vast majority of their children complete high school, they must move to the county seat at Shangri-la and reside in school dorms to do so.

16. (SBU) Heifer's Shangri-la field staff confirmed that the county government is supportive of the Naxi village project in the context of their official nomad resettlement program launched in 2008. According to online government information, the program targets nomads, semi-nomads, various rural populations facing relocation for unspecified reasons, and rural victims of natural disaster. In 2008, they settled 286 families during the program's first phase. The second phase, currently underway and due for completion by April 2010, aims to settle an additional 2,135 households. Comment: If the Naxi village project is typical of the settlement approach, then it arguably bodes well for the overall program as implemented in Shangri-la. However, it should be noted that nomad and other rural settlement programs often involve policies of much less benefit to the communities involved. For example, some nomad settlement programs in Sichuan province involve relocation to new urban housing developments that cut the connection to traditional livelihoods, while providing little in the way of viable new livelihood options. End comment.

The Mountain Institute:

Supporting Tibetan Pottery Makers and Eco-tourism

¶7. (SBU) Local staff at TMI's large and apparently quite active office in Shangri-la provided a quick briefing on a range of active projects, with primary focus on enterprise and eco-tourism development in northwest Yunnan's Tibetan communities. TMI's show-case enterprise development project aims to preserve the local Tibetan pottery tradition through support of improved craftsmanship and expanding market linkages.

Their main project partner, Dangzhen Pichu, is the son of a master potter now turned local entrepreneur. His enterprise, established in 2005, sits on the main road 45 minutes north of Shangri-la on the road to Degin, looking down over his home village where 60 percent of its 800 residents are full-time potters. Congenoff visited the business site, which includes a workshop, dorms for apprentices, and a display/sale area.

¶8. (SBU) Dangzhen Pichu said that he received investments totaling about 1,600,000 RMB (USD 235,000) from a variety of sources, including the United Nations and the Agricultural Bank of China. (He was most likely referring to the UN Environmental Program funds that are channeled through The Nature Conservancy, which in turn lends money via local cooperatives.) The county government has also helped by building public bathrooms at the roadside sales outlet and by government support to secure the land on which the business is located. TMI has focused on improving quality of the pottery, developing new tourist-oriented products, and increasing access to the expanding tourist market in Shangri-la.

¶9. (SBU) Danzhen explained that he takes on eight apprentices annually, graduates of the local middle school, providing them with living space, a monthly stipend of 200 RMB (USD 29), and nine months of training. After completing their apprenticeship, the young potters either remain with his enterprise or return to work with their respective families. He also discussed his plan for the next 5-8 years. He currently hires a number of the younger people with disabilities from his village and hopes to expand this program, establishing a second, more accessible, workshop in the village. He also wants to start training women as potters, noting that the local tradition has been that only the men do the pottery, leaving the women currently able to earn only about half as much as the men in the village.

¶10. (SBU) Congenoff also visited Hamagu, a traditional Tibetan village of about 200 located a few kilometers from downtown Shangri-la and previously supported by TMI in the establishment

CHENGDU 00000149 003.2 OF 003

of an eco-tourism capacity. Under the current USAID-funded Tibet Plateau Development Program (TPDP), TMI is providing additional training of village-based tourism operators. During a half-day visit to Hamagu, one resident told Congenoff that TMI trained him and several others to serve as village-based guides for tourists interested in exploring the adjacent Napa Hai wetlands nature reserve area and nearby mountain ranges, and supported the purchase of several vehicles for shuttling visitors in from town. Additionally, he noted that the TMI project assisted with the provision of solar water heaters for all of the approximately 40 households, significantly reducing their need to cut down nearby forest for fuel. TMI sources confirm that they fund about 70 percent of the solar water heater purchases.

¶11. (SBU) A separate tour operator in town, a Han businessman from Beijing who is also a TMI project partner, collected the 200 RMB fee and arranged for the village guide to meet Congenoff. The village guide reported a good working relationship with the town-based operator, who he said passed the guide fee on to him, although he did not specify how it was

divided between the two. A portion of the guide fee goes to a village environmental protection fund, managed by a village committee, he said. So far, the small scale eco-tourism seems not to have disrupted traditional life in the village. Cattle-raising and agriculture continue to be the village's economic mainstays, while eco-tourism supplements incomes and strengthens the community's stake in preserving the surrounding environment. Comment: As Shangri-la continues its rapid expansion as a national tourist destination, including the addition of several large hotels in recent years and an increasing flow of domestic tourism, this balance may be harder to sustain. End comment.

Ethnic Tibetan Projects in Yunnan

Relatively Free from Interference

¶12. (SBU) Comment: International NGOs operating in Tibetan areas within our district, both within the TAR and Sichuan province, have faced significant official obstruction over the last year and a half following the March 2008 unrest in Lhasa. However, northwestern Yunnan's Diqing Prefecture, where ethnic Tibetans are about 30 percent of the population, remains far less sensitive than other Tibetan areas. To date, organizations operating in northwestern Yunnan, especially those doing community development and medical work have encountered far fewer difficulties than their counterparts in other areas. Heifer International which simply provides livestock on the condition the recipients "pass on the gift" and has no international staff, still operates without difficulty in the Tibetan Autonomous Region.

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